

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **What is a Local Historic District (LHD)?**

LHDs offer real, tangible forms of protection for the preservation of historic structures and communities. There are over 200 LHDs in over 120 towns and cities across Massachusetts. They can be as small as a single property or include hundreds of them. The Provincetown LHD contains almost 1,000 properties. The average LHD is around 100 properties. The entire island of Nantucket is an LHD. Many smaller towns than Amherst have multiple LHDs. Currently, Amherst has one – the Dickinson LHD -- 39 properties situated in the vicinity of the Dickinson Museum, including properties in the Dickinson National Register District.

In an LHD, any proposed change to exterior architectural features visible from a public way that would require a Town building permit is reviewed by the locally appointed Historic District Commission. There is no review of interior features. Also, a variety of exterior features are usually exempt from review, such as paint color, air-conditioning units, fences, storm doors and windows. The addition of solar panels is encouraged and not restricted. An LHD doesn't mandate maintenance of properties. And it DOESN'T prevent new building, development or rental conversions.

## **What are the benefits of an LHD?**

An LHD prevents demolition of noteworthy structures without adequate review. It ensures that renovations and new structures are in keeping with the prevailing, existing architectural character and standards of the overall neighborhood and surroundings, while encouraging creative new design that is consistent in size or dimensions with other buildings in the neighborhood.

## **How does an LHD affect property values?**

According to a publication on LHDs by the Massachusetts Historical Commission, property values in LHDs stay the same or increase at a faster rate than those in similar, non-LHD designated areas.

## **If my neighbors and I already maintain the historic character of our properties, why do we need an LHD?**

By having an LHD, you can be assured that a NEW property owner across the street or next door also maintains the historic character of the neighborhood.

## **I thought that we were already in a historic district?**

Some of the buildings in the LHD (mainly on Lincoln, Sunset and Amity streets) are listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of two National Register

Districts. However, the National Register is an honorary designation and offers only minimal protection from construction using state or federal funds. By passing a Local Historic District, the historic and architectural character of our neighborhood based on its social, cultural and demographic history, can be better protected.

### **How is an LHD created?**

If there is strong interest in an LHD within a neighborhood, the town Select Board appoints a Study Committee to investigate the local district designation further. The Study Committee holds public meetings, seeks public input, researches the history of the area and prepares a report on its findings. The final step is passage of a historic district bylaw by a two-thirds majority at Town Meeting.

### **If my house is included in the LHD, does that mean I have to make it look more historic?**

No, you maintain the current look of your house as long as you would like. Again, an LHD only reviews proposed changes to exterior architectural features visible from a public way in order to maintain a consistent and coherent streetscape in the LHD. Routine maintenance of your property is exempt from review.

### **Who are members of the LHD Commission?**

A local bylaw describes specifically how the Select Board makes appointees to the LHD Commission, usually consisting of local architects, realtors, residents and property owners of the district.

### **Does this mean that I can't paint my house any color I want?**

No. You can paint your house any color you choose.

### **If my house was located in an LHD and I was constructing an addition that is visible from a public way, what would I have to do?**

During the process of acquiring the building permit for your addition, you would also apply for a certificate of appropriateness from the LHD Commission. The Commission then holds a public hearing and reviews your proposed plans in terms of the existing character of the LHD. If the addition is appropriate within the overall LHD, the Commission issues a certificate which you present to the Building Inspector to get your building permit. The Commission may recommend modifications to your project.